

**Witness Name: Mr Darren King**  
**Statement No: WITN0229\_01**  
**Exhibits: None**  
**Dated: 7 January 2022**

**IN THE POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY**

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**FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF MR DARREN KING**

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I, DARREN KING WILL SAY as follows:

**INTRODUCTION**

1. I am grateful to the Chair to be invited to provide a “human impact” statement, concerning the physical, psychological, emotional, reputational and financial consequences to me and my family of being held responsible for shortfalls shown by the Horizon IT system and Post Office Limited’s actions toward me and my family. The initial paragraphs below provide a brief summary of my background, and provide context to the detail of the human impact of the Horizon scandal on me and my family. This statement does not reflect a full account of my experiences or those of my family and if necessary or required I will provide further witness statement evidence.
2. I currently live in Redcar, Cleveland. I ran the Heugh Post Office in Hartlepool. I am now self-employed.
3. I left a career in the army, and thought that running a local post office would be a secure investment and good business opportunity. It would provide me with a good standard of living and be a vital link with the local community. I ran the business with help from family members.

**TRAINING**

4. I undertook 5 days of training in Liverpool and then 8 days training in my branch.
5. In my opinion, the training was inadequate and nowhere near enough needed. Only basic transactions were covered. There was no training on how to investigate and rectify any problems that may arise from the transaction if processed incorrectly.
6. Also, whilst I was shown how to carry out a balance on the system, I was not trained on what you should do if a balance could not be achieved.
7. I missed out on training in relation to passports and car tax as I had to return to Hartlepool to sort out the lease for the branch. I was not offered an alternative date for this training.
8. Further to this, I recall having a half day training when the Horizon system was upgraded.

#### **SHORTFALLS/HELPLINE**

9. In this section, I set out in very brief detail my experience of shortfalls arising from deficiencies in the Horizon IT System, and Post Office Limited's actions as a result. This is only a brief introduction to those matters, in order to provide necessary context for the explanation of the human impact which follows.
10. It is very difficult to remember exact dates given the timespan from my suspension till now. However, I do remember calling the helpline regularly, mainly to do with cash and balancing issues.
11. I never had much faith in the advice given as regularly, those giving the advice had to ask for advice themselves from other team members.
12. One of the most common replies would be not to worry as things will rectify themselves. They very rarely did.

13. On one occasion I reported a £7,000 loss to which the helpline just laughed, and her comment was "You're not going to have a very good evening tonight are you?"
14. Likewise, when I had a £15,000 gain, I was only able to work out why this had happened on my own. It was due to an issue on scanning a money pouch. If I had not discovered this myself, I would no doubt have been held responsible for making up this payment.
15. My staff members also had the same response from the helpline. They were often told not to worry and that the issue would sort itself out.
16. The first week I was in the branch I received a transaction correction of approximately £415. I queried the correction with the helpline, and it was a carryover from when the previous subpostmaster was in charge. Nevertheless, I was required to pay this, and advised that it would appear in a future correction. It never did.
17. On more than one occasion, there were cash transfers done by myself and my staff through the Horizon system that would show as a loss.
18. After speaking with the helpline and following their instructions, the loss doubled. Again, from the helpline, the advice was that the issue would sort itself out. The amount in question was £2000, which doubled to £4000.
19. I also recall two transaction corrections of £600 each for the ATM. I was shocked at the amounts being the same, so I contacted Chesterfield, the department I was directed to via the helpline.
20. I was asked to submit my weekly transaction reports and balance sheets for them to investigate. I forwarded them by Recorded Delivery. This issue was never resolved.

**AUDIT, SUSPENSION AND TERMINATION**

21. I underwent an audit on the 28 February 2013. I was asked into a secure area and told that between £12,000 and £13,000 was missing from my aunt's stock unit. I called her into the branch, and she admitted that she was struggling to balance her unit and had therefore been inflating her cash reserves to cover it.
22. At the end of the audit, I was told that the total loss was £30,258.21. This was the total arrived at from £26,133.14 cash, £4,040.03 stock (I never had that value of stock in the store in the first place), £1.20 postage, £88.63 foreign currency and a discrepancy of +£2.19 with the office snapshot.
23. I was passed the phone by one of the auditors and spoke with the contracts manager. I was suspended immediately.
24. Following my suspension on the 28 February 2013 the branch was shut. I was persuaded to allow an interim subpostmaster to come in to allow the post office to continue trading.
25. I was told that this would be beneficial to me and the community as the post office and shop could continue to trade. It reopened the following week.
26. The keys were taken from me, and I was told I was not allowed in the building, I could not retrieve any paperwork whether it was personal or related to the business.
27. A court order was issued against me preventing me from accessing the business.
28. I was interviewed regarding the losses. I felt intimidated and threatened. They refused to accept that I had nothing to do with the discrepancies. They were completely of the mind-set that I was a thief and a criminal.
29. The Post Office Investigators would not even consider the prospect that it could possibly be a fault with the system. I was guilty and should admit it.

30. On the 3 April 2013 I received a letter from the Post Office terminating my contract.
31. I was accused of breaching my contract by falsifying the trading accounts and not making good the losses.
32. I admitted to the false accounting because I had heard that other subpostmasters who had been accused of it but refused to admit it had been prosecuted for theft.
33. I was also advised to admit to the charges by the National Federation Representative, who also advised that if I resigned it would work out better for me than if I was suspended or had the contract terminated.
34. My lease was also terminated as I was accused of breaching the terms of the lease.
35. It was not until the 19 March 2014 that I finally found out that no further action was being taken against me.
36. For almost a year I was in limbo, with the threat of prosecution hanging over me. It was an horrendous time.
37. I am certain that the Post Office never carried out a proper investigation into the cause of the shortfalls.

### **HUMAN IMPACT**

38. Financially, I lost the capital investment of £60,000.
39. I was earning £50,000 a year and had the profit from the convenience store. All this was taken from me through no fault of my own.
40. My livelihood was ripped from me. It was my intention to remain working in the business until my retirement.

41. My parents lent me £20,000. I am yet to be financially able to pay them back.
42. I was distraught by the accusations during and after the audit on my post office. Even more so afterwards when I was accused of theft during my security interview and in the court order which I received a short time after my suspension / termination.
43. I was accused of using post office money to fund my criminal activities and had a restraint order placed upon my property and any assets.
44. I've never had so much as a parking ticket or speeding ticket in my life. I have served in HM Forces (Army) with an exemplary record, so to have these accusations thrown at me were a major blow to my self-esteem and confidence.
45. I lost my career as a subpostmaster. My income had been taken away from me in an instant. My future financial security including my pension had been taken away in the click of a finger by the post office.
46. I had to sell my home to cover the outstanding business loan for the good will gesture payment to the previous postmaster, who in my eyes was just as low as the post office. He terminated the lease so I couldn't even trade as a general dealer. All because I let an agency take over the post office to keep it open for the local community.
47. Later I found out there was a possibility he terminated the lease so he could reapply for the post office in his daughter's name. Talk about kicking someone while they are down.
48. I couldn't show my face in public. Although I had great support from my customers and friends, there were still those who would whisper rumours about me and what I was accused of doing.

49. I had no financial income and got myself into arrears with my mortgage and loan payments in relation to covering the cost of the good will payment made to the previous owner of my post office.
50. My ex-partner was living in the house, and was forced to leave as we had to sell. We only had 9 years left on the mortgage, so all that investment was gone. She has to live in rental accommodation as our credit rating is now so low.
51. I couldn't apply for any form of employment whilst the investigation was ongoing. As I thought, let's face it, who's going to employ someone under investigation of suspicion of fraud or theft against the post office?
52. In all honesty, there were occasions when I was stood on a train station platform and have wanted to step of the platform into one of the oncoming fast trains.
53. My family were in full support of me, as they know who I am as a person, but I'm sure there were those who may have asked their own questions.
54. My relationship wasn't at its best with my partner and subsequently ended not long after I was told there was to be no further action taken against me. Although I cannot blame the Post Office entirely for the collapse in my relationship, it was certainly a contributing factor.
55. I no longer enter the community where I held such a good standing with the residents.
56. It was difficult for my family at the time as they were the ones who couldn't hide away. Although we live in a town, this is a very small town, and it must have been difficult for them to avoid the rumours. It must have been difficult to hear people talking about their son and brother.

## **CONCLUSION**

57. What happened to me and to hundreds of others is an absolute disgrace. I would like the Post Office held to account for what they have done.

58. They have ruined lives. I would like an apology for their actions and recognition that I have had my name and reputation dragged through the mud. I and others also deserve to be compensated for what was done to us.

**STATEMENT OF TRUTH**

I believe that the facts stated in this Witness Statement are true.

Signe **GRO** ..... Dated *7<sup>th</sup> January 2022*  
DarrenKing